
San Diego Region: San Diego Area Government (SANDAG)

Overview

SANDAG is the primary transportation and planning agency in the San Diego region. Federal law designates SANDAG as a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and state law designates it as a Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA). SANDAG, operating as the San Diego County Regional Transportation Commission, also administers the half-cent county sales tax known as TransNet. SANDAG is largely responsible for determining the order in which the TransNet projects will be undertaken.

Two main transportation agencies have recently been merged within SANDAG: Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) and North County Transit District (NCTD). The MTS serves 570 square miles of southwestern San Diego County, a land area that includes over 70 percent of the county's population. The system consists of 15 express bus and 3 trolley routes, 74 local/urban bus routes, 6 demand-responsive services, and 2 paratransit operators. The NCTD service area encompasses 1,020 square miles of north San Diego County, with a total population service area of 823,000.

The Region

SANDAG governs transportation concerns in a region that is 4,261 sq. miles and has a population of 3.0 million (2006). The region has 19 jurisdictions (eighteen cities and an unincorporated area).



Primary Transportation Responsibilities

	Regional Systems Planning	Financial Resources	Capital and Infrastructure Construction	Systems Operation and Maintenance
Local	-	-	-	-
County	-	-	-	-
Regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The region's principle planning agency for both roads and transit. Plans investment and mobility strategies for the region Congestion management and other MPO duties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No general purpose taxing authority Administers Transnet Allocates a significant share of state and federal funds Fares and fees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SANDAG will soon begin overseeing transit construction projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversees transit providers

Significant Planning Authority. State and federal law assign SANDAG many planning responsibilities relating to transportation, housing, and regional planning.

Authority to Condemn Property. State law gives SANDAG eminent domain authority (the authority to condemn property) to carry out its responsibilities.

What authority it doesn't have:

- No Land Use Planning or Regulatory Authority beyond MPO responsibilities.
- No General-Purpose Taxation Authority.

Based on its planning responsibilities, SANDAG prepares the following reports:

- Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP lists the region's highest priority transportation projects through 2030. It is based on population projections and constrained by funding expectations.
- Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP). The RTIP is based on the RTP and lists specific projects that address the priorities raised in the RTP over a five-year time frame.
- Regional Short Range Transit Plan (RSRTP). SANDAG also prepares the RSRTP, which establishes short-term transit capital and service priorities for the region consistent with the RTP.
- Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP). The RCP is a planning document that brings together a number of different regional factors, including transportation, environment, housing, and economic growth. The RCP extends over a 25-year time horizon.

Structure

SANDAG began as a "council of governments," with each local agency appoints one or more elected representatives from its governing board to serve on the governing board of the regional agency. The local representative(s) serve at the pleasure of the appointing agency, and can be replaced when the appointing agency chooses.

SANDAG currently has four main committees and an executive committee:

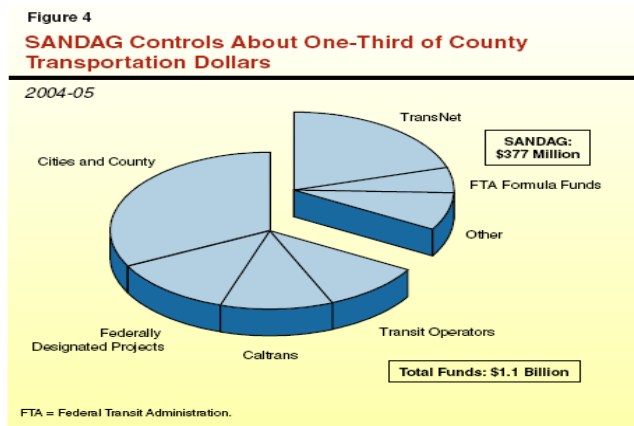
- Executive Committee. This committee provides direction in preparing items for board consideration and reviews SANDAG's overall work program and budget.
- Transportation Committee. This committee advises the SANDAG Board of Directors on major policy-level matters related to transportation. The committee assists in the preparation of regional transportation planning and programming efforts. It provides oversight for the major highway, transit, regional arterial, and regional bikeway projects.

- Regional Planning Committee. This committee provides oversight for the preparation and implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Plan and addresses interregional issues with surrounding counties and Mexico.
- Public Safety Committee. This committee advises the SANDAG Board of Directors on major policy-level matters related to the provision of public safety services.
- Borders Committee. This committee provides oversight for planning activities that affect the borders of the San Diego region (Orange, Riverside, and Imperial Counties, and the Republic of Mexico).

Financing

SANDAG allocates hundreds of million of dollars of federal, state, and countywide transportation resources annually. SANDAG sets tolls on single-occupant vehicles using high occupancy vehicle lanes, has influence over transit fares, and has authority to set tolls. SANDAG imposes assessments and fees to support its own operations.

Of the \$1.1 billion in transportation funding flowing through the San Diego region in 2005, SANDAG has the authority to direct about one-third. Figure 4 shows all transportation funding for San Diego and the sources over which SANDAG exercises a measure of control.



History

In 1966, the incorporated cities in the county formed the Comprehensive Planning Organization (CPO), as a subcomponent of the County of San Diego, to address long-range transportation and other regional planning issues. The CPO was a voluntary association, headed by representatives of the agencies that wished to be part of the organization. Six years later, the members of the planning organization reestablished the organization as a separate joint powers authority, independent of county government. In 1980, CPO changed its name to SANDAG.

Governance Elements

- **Municipal Membership is Voluntary or Required**
SANDAG is a coalition of municipalities that voluntarily came together over time to form a regional coordination system.

- **The Size of the Region**

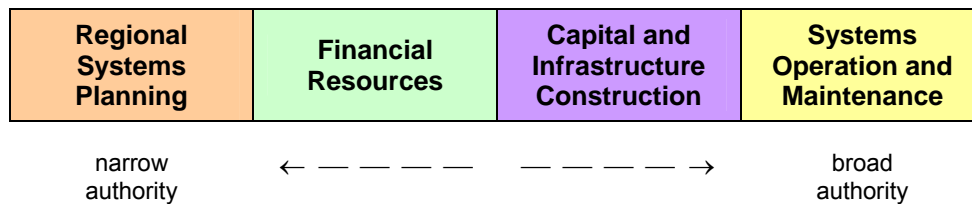
The region's size is large is able to address both present and future regional problems without expanding its borders. The region does not cross any county lines which makes coordination much less complicated

- **The Mode Responsibilities of the Authority**

SANDAG has responsibility for both roadway and transit projects, allowing for integrated planning and decision making and increased accountability.

- **The Transportation Functions of the Authority**

SANDAG has responsibilities across the spectrum of transportation functions: it is responsible for the regional transportation plan, it has considerable financial resources (via state and federal funds), and it has important infrastructure and operational responsibilities for transit services.



- **Land Use, Economic Development, and other Responsibilities**

SANDAG has housing, economic development, and environmental responsibilities, but it does not have any land use responsibilities, and therefore it has very little influence over transportation demand. Land use decisions are made exclusively by local governments.

- **Regional Authority Leadership**

The appointed board consists of municipal leaders from each of the 19 cities in the region, and well as several non-voting advisory members. Members serve at the pleasure of the municipality that nominated them. For any motion to pass, it must have the support of a majority of the members, as well as the support of members who represent at least 50% of the region's population.

- **Revenue-Sharing or Sub-Regional Equity**

SANDAG does not have a revenue-sharing or sub-regional equity practice, although both may be considered in the project prioritization process..

Other Related Issues

SANDAG decisions:

- SANDAG decisions often reflect regional concerns. SANDAG has created an RCP that sets forth a regional vision for growth in multiple areas, including transportation. Consistent with this RCP, the RTP chooses specific projects that reflect a concern with traditional transportation issues, such as congestion relief and cost effectiveness, but also incorporate more regional criteria, including: smart growth components, effects on housing, and environment issues. Projects score points in each of these areas, and the projects with the highest point totals are included in the RTP. This methodology resulted in SANDAG rating very highly “managed lanes” with bus-rapid transit running on them, as evidenced by their prominent place in both the RTP and the projects included in the most recently adopted TransNet measure.
- Regional decision-making faces constraints. Although SANDAG’s membership is geographically diverse, with representatives from cities across the county, the governance structure is not one that automatically fosters a regional perspective on issues. While the decision making and voting requirements necessitate a consensus approach to transportation issues, this consensus need not always represent a true regional perspective on issues. This is because the local officials that make up the SANDAG board are directly answerable only to their local constituents and governing boards. As a result, while SANDAG’s stated intention is to establish plans and choose projects based on their regional benefit, its members may at times be driven more by local concerns. Some of TransNet’s priorities, for instance, appear to be based on returning a “fair share” of funds to each city or in a manner that ensures geographic equity, rather than directing funds where they would maximize regional benefits.
- The SANDAG governing structure does not provide for representation proportional to the population of the region. Except for the City of San Diego, every local agency gets one representative, regardless of size. As a means of addressing this lack of proportionality, SANDAG’s voting procedures were modified to create a dual voting system. To be adopted, every measure must be supported by a majority of the votes cast (the tally vote) and by representatives from local agencies with at least one-half of the population in the region (the weighted vote). Thus, the voting structure of SANDAG provides representation proportional to population only to the extent that it allows representatives of jurisdictions comprising a majority of the region’s population to stop a proposal supported by smaller jurisdictions. This structure encourages the organizations focus on consensus decision making, a process that does not highlight public debate.
- SANDAG’s influence on transportation demand is limited. Transportation planning is highly dependent on land use, density, and travel patterns. SANDAG, however, has very little direct or indirect authority over any of these major factors. While SANDAG creates the regional plans and directs transportation funds to carry out those plans, it cannot force the cities and the county to develop according to its plans, nor does it possess significant tools necessary to create incentives that would encourage development consistent with these plans. As a result, it largely takes transportation demand as a given, and attempts to match it with adequate supply.
- SANDAG has no land use authority, due primarily to the fact that land use decisions are made by local governments without SANDAG input or review. In creating its regional plans, SANDAG can only take the local general plans as given and structure its plan around them, and in fact land use decisions have not been transferred to SANDAG.
- Other areas of concern or commendation mentioned were:
 - RTPs not done according to smart growth principles.
 - Improved Coordination of Transit Services
 - Economies of Scale in Capital Project Development.
 - Coordination Between Transit Operators.
 - Consolidation Under SANDAG Needs Clarification
 - Reallocation of Planning Staff..
 - Oversight May Be Overly Detailed.